

The Builder.

No. CXXI.

SATURDAY, MARCH 29, 1845.



THE Commissioners for promoting the Fine Arts, in connection with the new Palace of Westminster, passed a resolution previous to the late exhibition of works of decorative art in King-street, St. James's, to the effect, that those persons who might be selected for employment on matters of that description, should, if the commissioners thought fit, be required to produce a specimen of their art, to be completed under such conditions as the commissioners might stipulate.

They afterwards selected certain artists who had submitted drawings, and singled out one (very justly, so far as the work in his name was considered) as pre-eminently deserving to be employed in the new Houses.

On this the wood-carvers in London held a meeting, eighty were present; and, first approving the principle laid down in the resolution of the committee referred to, expressed their conviction that the artist thus distinguished was not competent to produce works equal in delicacy of execution to those exhibited in his name, and called on the commissioners to require him to execute a specimen under such regulations as might remove all doubts of his right to the position in which he had been placed. Further, they pointed out that a second artist selected by the commissioners was not a carver, and was incapable of producing work equal to that exhibited as his, and suggested that the practical ability of all the gentlemen selected for employment as wood-carvers at the new Houses of Parliament should be tested.

A memorial, founded on resolutions passed at the meeting, was signed by ninety-three wood-carvers in London, five in Bristol, five in Warwick, three in Lamington, and three in Peterborough, and was presented at the close of last year. To this they have recently received the following reply:—

Whitehall, 1st March, 1845.

SIR,—I have in acquaint you that a petition, signed by various wood-carvers, and forwarded by you to Benjamin Hawes, Esq., M.P., to be presented to her Majesty's Commissioners on the Fine Arts, has been submitted to them accordingly, and that I have received their commands to notify to you in reply, that they are resolved in every case to satisfy themselves that artists are fully competent to execute with their own hands the works that may be allotted to them.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

C. L. EASTLAKE; Sec.

Mr. W. G. Lock, Hon. Sec.

We have purposely avoided naming the artists alluded to, as it is to be hoped they will be able to satisfy their brother carvers of their right to the position given them: we deal simply with the principle involved.

The resolution arrived at by the commissioners is a good one. It is of the utmost importance to get rid of the third person standing between the public and the artist: until this be done, he remains simply a mechanic, and cannot hope to raise himself, any more than we can hope he will aid in raising his profession. Wood-carvers in England have been long kept down, and we

are most anxious to see the opportunity of encouraging carving, offered in the rebuilding of the new Houses of Parliament, made available to the utmost extent.

"We have very little opportunity of designing," said Mr. Mitchell, a wood-carver, to the Committee on the fine arts in 1841. "We are generally, which I consider the principal evil of the business, under the dominion of upholsterers; so that we very seldom design any work, or have any opportunity of doing so. The higher part of our profession is not encouraged. So far as regards the encouragement we receive at present, it is very little, or rather it tends to depress us from proceeding in any way as respects improving ourselves; for the generality of our work we receive from upholsterers, whose business it is to curtail the price as much as possible. And further, an intermediate person being employed is injurious, not so much that it affects the remuneration for our labour, as that it destroys every opportunity of rising in our profession." And this, all who have watched the effect of the system both on carving and glass-painting, and other decorative arts, must at once admit to be true, and be desirous to remedy.

We are glad to find the carvers bestirring themselves to obtain a proper place in society; still more so that they are anxious as a body to fit themselves to maintain it. In the association which they have formed, books on their art, specimens, and prints, are eagerly studied, and we fully believe that nothing but opportunity is wanting to develop some first-rate artists.

Being much interested in the subject, we have taken pains to learn the condition of this society, and find that there are now 108 members, fourteen of whom are employed in the country, and exempt from subscription, and that the number is steadily increasing. During the last three months several works have been purchased by the society for the use of its members, and a fine cast of a Saviour, from a crucifix executed in wax, at Rome, for Napoleon. The last quarterly return showed that there had been, in the preceding three months, 131 loans of books or prints from the collection, including forty-three works on Gothic designs, eighteen Elizabethan, seventeen French, six heraldic, five Greek and Roman, &c. &c.; showing a great demand for Gothic in proportion to other styles. Halfpenny's York Minster has the largest circulation of this class, next follows the Glossary of Architecture, and then Pugin: in the same three months there were sixteen loans of casts. They subscribe regularly to the Art-Union of London. About three years since the Society sustained a severe loss by one of the trustees absconding with more than £200, otherwise it has prospered and increased from its formation; still, the contribution being small, few purchases can be made, and we venture to suggest to our readers that donations of prints and books would increase its usefulness.

Among the most recent carvings executed in England, the patterns for the gates of the Fitzwilliam Museum, at Cambridge, designed by Mr. Baskett, are well spoken of.

LIGHTING BY ELECTRICITY.—Mr. Weekes's plan for lighting towns by electricity is about to be carried into effect in America. The editor of the *Cincinnati Mechanic* states that an experiment he lately witnessed was perfectly successful, that the apparatus is by no means costly, and that for lighting Cincinnati, two towers, it is considered, will be sufficient to illuminate the whole city. Mr. Weekes's plan was first published in this country as far back as 1831.

GLASS AND GLAZING.

"By some fortuitous liquefaction," remarks Dr. Johnson in the *Rambler*, "was mankind taught to produce a body at once in a high degree solid and transparent, which might admit the light of the sun, and exclude the violence of the wind—which might extend the sight of the philosopher to new ranges of existence, and charm him at one time with the unbounded extent of the material creation, and at another with the endless subordination of animal life; and what is yet of more importance, might supply the decay of nature, and succour old age with a subsidiary sight. Thus was the first artificer in glass employed, though without his own knowledge or expectation. He was facilitating and prolonging the enjoyment of light, enlarging the avenues of science, and conferring the highest and most lasting pleasures; he was enabling the student to contemplate nature, and the beauty to behold herself."

The removal of the duties from this very adaptable and important material has induced considerable stir in the glass trade, and cannot fail to lead to many advantageous results. To the shares of glass companies it has imparted sudden value. Manufactories long since shut up have been opened again, and in other places where they have continued in operation, are forthwith to be enlarged. The Birmingham Plate Glass Company, who relinquished business two years ago, are about to renew their operations, we are told, which will have the effect of giving employment to hundreds of persons. The manufacture is to be revived in Cork, where it went to decay after the imposition of the duty. Works for the production of glass are talked of in Worcester; and in Sunderland Messrs. Hartley and Co. have commenced building three new glass-bottle houses, which will give occupation to nearly a hundred men. Moreover, persons heretofore in the habit of importing Bohemian glass in large quantities are about to discontinue doing so, and to turn their attention to the manufacture of the material in this country.

Sir Robert Peel asserted in his financial statement, that the square of glass which now costs one shilling would be reduced to fourpence; but, in reality, the reduction will not be quite so great, and when put into our windows the difference to the consumer will be even less, as the value of the glaziers' labour remains the same, and forms an important part of the cost of a square of glass. Common glazing in sashes will be done probably for 7d. per foot.

The immediate reduction in cost, however, although this will be considerable, is not the ultimate advantage of the alteration. The working of the present system (next week we shall be able to say, of the *old system*), is troublesome and oppressive; as it entails the constant presence of an exciseman, even when glass is produced in very small quantities, merely for the sake of experiments; and has had the effect of preventing efforts to improve its manufacture, and of rendering the application of additional skill and ingenuity almost impossible.

It cannot be doubted that in a very short time considerable improvements will follow the removal of restrictions; and that the actual cost of glass will be lessened very considerably. That it will be applied in numerous ways at present unthought of, seems certain. The premier spoke of the superiority of a balance-spring of a chronometer made of glass instead of steel; and alluded to pipes of glass now being manufactured in France, for the conveyance of water, which cost 30 per cent. less than pipes manufactured of iron, and would bear a greater external pressure than iron.

Since then we have heard of glass bells for churches, glass mountings for weavers' looms, glass pavements for streets and halls, glass milk pans, and various other novel applications of it. A provincial paper speaks of a "picture-frame of common wood, the front of which is overlaid with strips of glass beautifully mottled, so as to produce the effect of stained wood."

* Flory gives the following account of the discovery of manufacturing glass:—A merchant vessel, laden with various sorts of vessels, being driven on the coast of Palestine, near the river Belus, the crew accidentally supported the keel on which the vessel's keel lay on pieces of the alkali; the sand about it was melted by the action with the alkali, and produced glass.